Junior helps prepare the stage for the performance. There is a college of students, and a professional performer. Also young people. It is important to the society to have an education. The Gurukulam provides education and Kuttu training.

The KKG means normal education and this is very important, to be aware of the society and to have an education. Kuttu actors and companies need to be educated, because Kuttu is a way of learning and a way of communicating. The audiences learn from the Kuttu performances, so it is important that we are educated. For example the role of the women, this is something I wanted to communicate to the village communities. Also you need education to read the Kuttu songs and dialogues. Female Tamilarasi during a performance. Normal study does not suit all children, many of these children need Kuttu, they need the theatre for themselves. When the children enjoy themselves during the training, there is a better environment for learning.

3. What does storytelling mean to you?
Stories are my ideas. Stories make you look how this can be in your life. It is like teaching, it helps people to understand. The Villiatum Villau (The Kuttu currently being rehearsed by the Junior Students, based on the early years of the Pandava’s and Kaurava’s, the central

INTERVIEW WITH MR. P. RAJAGOPAL,
Executive Director of the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam, kattaiku@gmail.com

Interviewed by: HEBE REILLY.
World Theatre specialist, hebereilly@hotmail.co.uk

Translation: K.RADHAKRISHNAN
K.Radhakrishnan, professional Kattaikkuttu performer, Kattaikkuttu Young Professional Company,
kriambiga@gmail.com

1. What is Kattaikkuttu? What stories does it tell?
Kattaikkuttu tell the Idigarsam stories – the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, stories of Vishnu and Aiyappan. Kattaikkuttu is story, music, song, dance, talking – the story and all of these elements make Kuttu.

2. What is the KKG? Why did you establish the KKG?
I established the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam because when I was 10 years old I could no longer study. I joined my father's company, and being a Kuttu performer means that you have to leave education. The Gurukulam provides education and Kuttu training.

Female Tamilarasi during a performance
protagonists in the war of the Mahabharatha) teaches the kids not be jealous. How this childhood rivalry can be understood in our life. The Magic Horse also helps us, how we can help in society and overcome anything just through believing in our selves. Stories are like teaching.

4. What are your first experiences of storytelling/Indian folk-lore?
My first performance was in my father's company at 10 years old. In the morning, my father gave me the instruction to play Sahadeva, the youngest Pandava. I had just finished my exams and had wanted to play in the company. I was not afraid. It was the performance that includes the disrobing of Draupadi. I remember the Virrutam, the dialogue Sahadeva had with Dharma. All were discussing Duryodhana, the Pandava’s cousin and enemy.

(Rajagopal plays Sahadeva, the youngest Pandava brother. His father played Dharma, the eldest brother. They are speaking about Duryodhana and their enemies. Rajagopal begins to sing the Virrutam for me in Tamil, translating as he goes along. The dialogue between the brothers at this point discusses whether they should try and defeat or visit the Kauravas)

We go there, how do you think I am, a mouse, a rabbit? Duryodhana is a cat, a tiger, we are the deer. Duryodhana is an elephant, we are the leaves of the banana tree that he eats. Duryodhana is the snake, we are the small insects.

5. What do you think the relationship is between storytelling and culture?
There is a very close relationship between storytelling and culture. It is close to all people. All the people in the audience make culture, and the performances happen at the temple. Everything is a part of our culture. The make up, the pooja, the stage by the temple. All of this is culture. Storytelling is what performers offer to the people, but also it comes from the people. When we organize the festivals, then we have tampallah (contact). This is the way to initiate a performance and to begin a dialogue between our stories and this culture. The village cries out for stories and theatre and we go to perform. It is alive, this relationship.

6. Do you believe that oral traditions and Indian folk-lore are dying out?
No. No. They are alive.

7. How do you think the Mahabharatha relates to the modern world?
People still ask more for the Mahabharatha stories. The RamaRavana performance is not so popular in the village. People don’t ask for the Ramayana. But you saw on Dec 25, at the Draupadi temple in Bramadesan, they asked for a Mahabharatha story. Every village has a temple that connects to the Mahabharatha. It is modern, these characters and stories are a
part of the life of the audience and community.

8. Do you see any of the epic characters from the Mahabharatha in the world today?
I see Sadam Hussain as Duryodhana. In the last they both went down inside the ground to hide. It is the same, they were bad men that went down underground, returned to the ground. Same as Indrajit, he also went underground. I really saw this when Sadam Hussain was found in the hole in the floor – that he is Duryodhana, escaping this way.

What about Draupadi, can you see a modern Draupadi?
No, not Draupadi, because she has 5 husbands, she is the only one.

9. How do you ensure Kattaikkuttu speaks to modern audiences?
Kattaikkuttu has kept the same style, people still commission the Mahabharatha stories by our company in the same style. The epic remains true to the tradition – the songs, the dialogues. It is the clowns that speak to the modern audience though. The Kattiyakarens must speak to the audiences, understand what is happening in the world. Also we can write stories about the modern world, but the Mahabharatha stays true to all time, because it is about humans.

10. Where do you see storytelling in the future?
In the temples. Short answer, in the temples. The Ramayana is in the temples. The Mahabharatha festivals are in the temples and these are very important. The people will always gather and collect there because these figures are important. It is there where the stories will stay.